



**JOHN BECKWITH:
MUSIC FOR VOICE, 1949-99**

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
Faculty of Music

Friday, October 30, 1999 at 8 p.m.
Walter Hall

FACULTY OF MUSIC

Presents

JOHN BECKWITH:
MUSIC FOR VOICE, 1949-99

1 *The Great Lakes Suite, 1949* text, James Reaney
Lake Superior – Lake Michigan – Lake Huron – Lake St. Clair – Lake Erie –
Lake Ontario

Kathryn Domoney, soprano; Doug MacNaughton, baritone; Colin Savage, clarinet;
Margaret Gay, cello; John Beckwith, piano

2 from *A CHAUCER SUITE, 1962* text, Geoffrey Chaucer
Now welcome, somer – Compleynt to his purs – Gentilesse

Laura Pudwell, mezzo-soprano; Benjamin Butterfield, tenor; Doug MacNaughton,
baritone

3 from the opera *THE SHIVAREE, 1978* libretto, James Reaney
Act 1: aria (Miss Beech) and duo (Daisy, Jonathan)

Kathryn Domoney, Miss Beech; Teri Dunn, soprano, Daisy; Benjamin Butterfield,
Jonathan; William Aide, piano; Jeffr y McFadden, guitar; Beverley Johnston, percussion

4 from *SIX SONGS to POEMS by e. e cummings, 1982*
o purple finch - Jimmie's got a goil

Doug MacNaughton, William Aide

5 *OLD MEG MERRILLEES, 1988* text, John Keats

Laura Pudwell, John Beckwith

6 from the opera *CRAZY TO KILL, 1988* libretto, James Reaney
Freedom aria (Agatha); dialogue (Agatha, Detective Fry)

Laura Pudwell, Agatha; Doug MacNaughton, Fry; John Beckwith, Beverley Johnston



Official media sponsor of the Faculty of Music's 1999-2000 season

7 A BIRTHDAY GREETING for HARRY FREEDman, 1992 found text

Teri Dunn, John Beckwith

8 from the opera TAPTOO!, 1995 libretto, James Reaney

Act 2, scene 4: duo (Atahentsic, Mrs Simcoe)

Kathryn Domoney, Atahentsic; Laura Pudwell, Mrs Simcoe; William Aide, Beverley Johnston

INTERMISSION

9 ALL AT ONCE, 1995 text, bpNichol

Kathryn Domoney, Laura Pudwell, Benjamin Butterfield, Doug MacNaughton

10 STACEY, 1997 text, Margaret Laurence

Teri Dunn, William Aide

11 YOUNG MAN FROM CANADA, 1998 arranged, traditional sources

Tighinn Do America (Cape Breton) - Peter Emberley (Miramichi)- Young Man from Canada (Cariboo) - De szeretnék hajnal csillag lenni (Saskatchewan) - Le Roulier (Gaspé)
Benjamin Butterfield, John Beckwith

* * *

Meet the Artists

William AIDE, professor of piano in the Faculty of Music, once studied music theory in John Beckwith's class. He performs a solo concert in the Faculty Artists Series on 21 January 2000. He is also a poet and critic, and in 1996 published a collection of essays and memoirs, *Starting from Porcupine*.

John BECKWITH is a Faculty of Music professor emeritus and former dean. His premières in the 1990s have included *Round and Round* for orchestra, *Eureka* for nine wind instruments, and (his fifteenth collaboration with the London, Ontario, poet/playwright James Reaney) the opera *Taptoo!*.

Benjamin BUTTERFIELD recently performed in France, England, and Holland, as well as for the Canadian Opera Company (*Cunning Little Vixen*), the Calgary Opera (*Falstaff*), and the Montreal Symphony (*L'Enfant et les sortilèges*). He was a member of the original cast of the Harry Somers/James Reaney opera *Serinette*.

Kathryn DOMONEY is a Faculty of Music graduate, and once took John Beckwith's course "Music of North America." She was soloist with the COC (*Cunning Little Vixen*), the Aldeburgh Connection, and the Mississauga Choral Society (*Messiah*), and in Sullivan's *Florence* with the Elora Festival and Opera in Concert.

Teri DUNN holds a Mus.M. from the Faculty of Music. She has sung with New Music Concerts, the Arbor Oak Trio, the Toronto Symphony, and most recently with the Toronto Mendelssohn Choir (Mendelssohn's *St Paul*). Her performance later this season with Aradia, an all-Bach program, will be recorded on the Naxos label.

Margaret GAY took the Mus.M. degree in cello in the Faculty of Music. She appears regularly with Toronto's leading ensembles in both early music and new music repertoires, and is a member of the Modern Quartet.

Beverley JOHNSTON, a Faculty of Music graduate, has an active international career as percussion soloist. Composers who have written works for her include Freedman, Chan, Kulesha, Louie, Hatch, Southam, Jaeger, and others.

Doug MacNAUGHTON's recent engagements include L'Opéra de Québec and Pacific Opera Victoria (*L'Italiana in Algeri*), the COC (*Xerxes*, *The Golden Ass*), and Les Grands ballets canadiens (*Carmina Burana*). He premiered István Anhalt's *Traces* for baritone and orchestra and Graham Cozzubbo's opera about Satie, *Paris 1916*.

Jeffrey McFADDEN is considered one of Canada's premier guitarists. A competition prize winner and international recording artist, he maintains an active career as a recitalist. He has also worked extensively with singers, performing in the première of R. Murray Schafer's *Enchanted Forest*.

Laura PUDWELL appeared recently with Opera Atelier (*Le Nozze di Figaro*) and the Calgary Opera (*Falstaff*) and in a CD recording of *Dido and Aeneas* with Le concert spirituel. She performs regularly with the Toronto Consort, and like Benjamin Butterfield participated in the première of *SerINETTE*.

Colin SAVAGE plays classical clarinet and basset horn in chamber and orchestral concerts and recordings, as well as modern clarinet (Mississauga Symphony). As a member of Musick Fyne he took part in the première of Beckwith's *The Hector*.

NOTES by the composer

1

The six poems of James Reaney's *The Great Lakes Suite* appear in *The Red Heart and other poems*, the collection for which he won the Governor General's Award for poetry in 1949. Reaney had given me a typescript of some of the *Red Heart* poems, and I asked if I could try setting these. At Norman and Betty Endicott's one evening (Norman was Reaney's English professor), he and I listened to the 78-r.p.m. recording of Walton and Sitwell's *Façade* and thought it bright and novel (nowadays I find it instead rather arch). Another discovery, Ravel's *Chansons madécasses*, reinforced the idea of a small vocal-instrumental chamber ensemble.

The *Suite* was first performed on CBC Radio in February 1950 by Lois Marshall, Bernard Johnson, Leslie Mann, Cornelius Ysselstyn, and myself. At the live première a few weeks later in a concert of works by student composers, Glenn Gardiner and Rowland Pack replaced Johnson and Ysselstyn. Revivals featured the sopranos Elizabeth Benson Guy, Mary Morrison, and Barbara Franklin; the baritone Charles Jordan; the clarinetists Ezra Schabas and Avram Galper; the cellist Isaac Mammott; the pianist Leo Barkin; and others. In a notable student performance around 1970 the young singers were Mary Lou Fallis and Gary Relyea.

The literary critic who ridiculed the opening of "Lake Huron" ("Yoo hoo, yoo hoo, I'm blue, blue Lake Huron") evidently wasn't stimulated to imagine, as I did, a wide-eyed ten-year-old in a school pageant reciting this. The parody, the specific indigenous details, and the echoes of popular culture in these texts attracted me. The finished result is a student's music, and, for example, the instrumental devices are quite limited; I knew very little about either the clarinet or the cello and was clearly too readily satisfied with octave doublings. But the prosody strikes me as not bad, and the setting of "Lake Ontario" is unexpected and fairly dramatic: eschewing brittle parody at the last, the artist resolves to become a "megaphone" for the waves. On the whole I am fonder of this than of any of my other early stuff.

2

Stravinsky's vocal works to English-language texts from the 1950s were full of interest for me -- the *Cantata*, the *Shakespeare songs*, and *In memoriam Dylan Thomas*, and later *The Dove descending* and *A Sermon, a Narrative, and a Prayer*. They seemed to reveal a new kind of harmonic treatment, applying serial principles to lines that were not rigidly "twelve-tone," lines that might contain fewer than eleven intervals, arranged in successions which might even be diatonic but not "tonal" in the conventional sense.

A *Chaucer Suite*, four unaccompanied settings composed in 1962, was performed in Montreal by Le Petit ensemble vocal, under George Little, and very seldom after that. The opening and closing texts, the one a poetic greeting to spring (as a promise of summer to come) and the other a comment on the difference between true integrity and rank, still strike me as especially beautiful. In

between is the aging and financially embarrassed poet's ballade to his empty purse. I imagined them declaimed in plain melodic fashion, without instruments.

3

In the 1950s James Reaney and I had collaborated on a one-act opera, *Night Blooming Cereus*. Following its first performances in 1959 and 1960, we both felt we should attempt something on a larger scale, this time in the comic genre. He conceived an indigenous topic, the raucous custom of the "shivaree" (from the original French, *charivari*), a mock wedding serenade on pots' and pans. The libretto combines slapstick farce with black comedy: tired of waiting for her reluctant boy-friend Jonathan to propose, Daisy accepts and marries the village capitalist, William Quartz, thirty years her senior, whose previous spouses have disappeared mysteriously. The *deus ex machina* in the tale is the local school teacher, Miss Beech: her *machina*? a bicycle.

The *Shivaree* was produced in Toronto and Banff in 1982. I am happy that the organization Opera in Concert will revive the work in its series in April 2000. Reaney's libretto seemed to me rich in inventive detail, and still does. The musical score draws on classical models more than any of my other operas have done: Quartz pleads with the noisy bumpkin band like Orpheus with the Furies; the hired man, Ned, suggests a cross-dressing Despina; Miss Beech is a benign Queen of the Night. This excerpt, a continuous scene in the middle of Act One, is highlighted by the aria of Beech and the "farewell" duet of the young lovers (in the orchestral version, the hero's guitar proved a good foil to the heavy percussion of Act Two's "shivaree" scenes).

4

Six Songs to Poems by e. e. cummings form a baritone sequel to the four soprano settings from this poet composed for Lois Marshall in 1950. "Jimmie's got a goil" is a delightful verse I had long thought of setting. There is a version of it by Marc Blitzstein; I prefer mine. "O purple finch" is a beautifully balanced poem in two stanzas of just twenty-four syllables each.

The complete *cummings* set was introduced by Mark Pedrotti and William Aide in 1982. Other baritones who have performed it include Gary Relyea, Bruce Kelly, and Doug MacNaughton.

5,6

The full-length "detective opera" *Crazy to Kill* was commissioned by the Guelph Spring Festival and first performed in Banff and Guelph in 1988 and 89. Adapted by Reaney from a whodunit by a local writer of his home town, Stratford, Ontario, it takes place in the 1930s at a fashionable rest home for disturbed people. The five performers play a total of twenty-two rôles; with the help of hand-held doll-puppets. The accompaniment is for piano and percussion only; these two players also participate in the action. The central characters are Agatha Lawson, a prim and eccentric middle-aged woman, and Detective Fry, a Raymond Chandler type in trenchcoat and fedora. Like the gumshoe of Chandler's *The White Tower*, Fry finds himself romantically attracted to his female suspect. Early in the action, entrusted with the keys to the building, Agatha contemplates running away. In a later reprise, this "freedom aria" becomes entwined in an intense dialogue with Fry, at the end of which she actually does depart.

The rapid and slangy prose script of *Crazy to Kill* demanded a flexible kind of music, with frequent references to the idiom of Rodgers and Hart or Harold Arlen. For the moments of horror and gore I drew on memories of eerie sound effects from 30s radio.

On leaving, Agatha says she'll be "a gypsy." In an early draft of the script, Reaney had her quote two stanzas from the ballad by John Keats about Meg Merillees, a gypsy character in two novels by Scott. I liked this poem and set it complete, in a modal "white-note" style. When it proved unsuitable for the opera, I retrieved it as a concert song. Patricia Kern and William Aide gave the first performance in 1990.

7

For Harry Freedman's seventieth birthday in 1992, I composed a miniature tribute for voice and piano, based on a set of pitches derived from ten of the thirteen letters in his name (using English, French, and German nomenclature for the pitches). I made up a "found text" consisting of the ten-syllable greeting, "Happy birthday, Harry Freedman, to you," and the titles of thirteen of Freedman's compositions. Barbara Hannigan and I gave the first rendition at Harry's birthday party, and the song was repeated as an encore at a concert in his honor presented by New Music Concerts.

8

Taptoo! is a full-length "documentary ballad opera" which tells of the founding of York (Toronto) in the period 1780-1810. The work depicts both fictional and historical characters. At the Upper Canadian capital, Newark (Niagara-on-the-Lake), the well-bred Englishwoman Elizabeth Posthuma Simcoe, wife of the first governor, tries to find a wave-length of communication with Atahentsic (an invented character), proud daughter of a First Nations chief, who has married Simcoe's lieutenant. Their style of marriage is an issue with Mrs Simcoe, a staunch Anglican.

McGill Opera gave the first staging of *Taptoo!* in Montreal in March 1999. Laura Pudwell sang the part of Mrs Simcoe at the first workshop of the opera in Toronto in 1994.

9

I had two happy collaborations with bpNichol in the 1980s -- *Mating Time* for chorus, keyboard, and percussion, and *Avowals*, a short monodrama for tenor and three keyboard instruments. After his sudden early death in 1988 I responded to a commission from the Elora Festival with a choral suite, *beep*, based on chosen texts from various of his writings (in correspondence, Nichol sometimes signed himself "beep"). When asked to compose a short secular motet to be performed at a family wedding, I again chose words by Nichol, this time two fragments from his huge *Martyrology* series.

The one-line poem consisting of four interlocked expressions of three syllables each seemed to me a gift for a four-voiced choral setting. I took the liberty of repeating it with the interlocking order reversed. These two brief musical pillars stand at the start and finish of a little song about truth and simplicity and love, and provide its entire melodic source.

Stacey McAindra is the frustrated wife-and-mother heroine of Margaret Laurence's 1968 novel *The Fire-Dwellers*. There is a good deal of music in the novel, including the recurrent quotation of the nursery jingle "Ladybird, ladybird, fly away home," and a scene where, her children not yet home from school, Stacey nips into the gin and dances around the livingroom remembering some Tommy Dorsey trombone solo from her days at highschool dances. I was especially attracted to Stacey's imagined conversations with God. My choice of extracts includes a number of these (one of them mimicking the cloying Victorian hymntune "Rest," mentioned by Laurence), as well as the Dorsey-and-gin scene. The latter required, I remember, several rewrites before I was satisfied with it.

Commissioned by the Aldeburgh Connection for Monica Whicher, this "sung monologue" was first performed in 1998 by her with the pianist Stephen Ralls. Teri Dunn performed it in May 1999 as a finalist in the national Eckhardt-Gramatté competition.

When he was in the CBC music department in the 1970s, John Roberts commissioned several settings of Canadian "folk music." Harry Somers' choral *Five Songs of the Newfoundland Outports* remains one of the most successful results. I made piano-and-solo-voice transcriptions for baritone (Donald Bell) and for alto (Maureen Forrester) which were recorded by these artists and performed widely by them and by other singers. In each set, I grouped together songs from several Canadian ethnic sources, in several different languages, thinking to express in this way the "Canadian mosaic." In late 1998 and early 1999, I found time to make corresponding sets for tenor and for soprano. The titles are *Young Man from Canada* and *I Love to Dance*.

Darryl Edwards performed numbers 3, 4, and 5 of this set in Ann Arbor, Michigan, in January 1999 and the entire set in August in Woodstock, Ontario. This is the first Toronto performance.

I responded differently to each of the chosen songs. The Cape Breton song, whose Gaelic text is attributed to a young immigrant of 1819, suggested a wave-like rhythm, probably gentler than that of the ship he sailed in. The verses of "Peter Emberley" vary the lovely melodic line in several ways; the original, recalling a tragic accident to a young lumberman in New Brunswick, is justifiably one of the best-known traditional songs of Canada. In the title of the Cariboo Gold-Rush song, "Canada" means today's central Canada. The setting evokes dance-hall rhythms; the piano part rivals that of the voice in its extroversion. The Hungarian song, from Saskatchewan, by contrast, has a mysterious, unresolved, and therefore rather dissonant, flavor. The last piece, "Le Roulier," is a composed song by a French songwriter of the mid-19th century. However, I was unable to trace the original, and know it only from the version of Thomas-Étienne Hamel, compiler of a late-19th-century manuscript collection in the little village of Petit Cap on the Gaspé coast. I suspect the original setting brings out, more than mine does, the humor of the dialect text; I recognized this but preferred to emphasize the song's touching and poignant character. Is the young army recruit a French Peter Emberley?

from *A Chaucer Suite*
texts

"Now welcome somer," roundel (from *The Parlement of Foules*)

Now welcome, somer, with thy sonne softe,
That hast thise wintres wedres overshake,
And driven away the large nightes blake.

Saint Valentin, that art ful heigh on lofte,
Thus singen smale foules for thy sake: (1)
Now welcome, somer, with thy sonne softe...

Wel han they cause for to gladen ofte,
Sith ech of hem recovered hath his make; (2)
Ful blisful mowe they singe whan they wake: (3)
Now welcome, somer, with thy sonne softe...

"Compleynt to his purs," ballade

To you, my purs, and to non other wight,
Complain I, for ye be my lady dere.
I am so sorry, now that ye be light,
For certes, but if ye make me hevye cheere,
Me were as lief be laid upon my beere;
For which unto your mercy thus I crye:
Beeth hevye again, or elles moot I die.

Now voucheth sauf this day er it be night
That I of you the blisful soun may heere,
Or see your colour, lik the sonne bright,
That of yellownesse hadde never peere.
Ye be my lyf, ye be myn hertes steere, (4)
Queene of confort and of good compaignye:
Beeth hevye again, or elles moot I die.

Ye purs, that ben to me my lives light
And saviour, as in this world down here,
Out of this tonne help me through yourmight, (5)
Sith that ye wol nat be my tresorere;
For I am shave as neigh as any frere.
But yit I pray unto your courteisye:
Beeth hevye again, or elles moot I die.

"Gentilesse," ballade

The first fader and findere of gentilesse,
What man desireth gentil for to be
Moste folwe his traas, and alle his wittes dresse (6)
Vertu to sue, and vices for to flee:
For unto vertu longeth dignitee,
And nought the revers, sauflly dar I deeme,
Al were he mitre, croune, or diademe. (7)

This firste stok was ground of rightwysnesse,
Trewe of his word, sobre, pietous, and free:
Clene of his gost, and loved bisnesse
Against the vice of slouthe, in honestee;
And but his heir love vertu as dide he,
He is nat gentil, though he riche seeme,
Al were he mitre, croune, or diademe.

Vice may wel be heir to old richesse,
But ther be no man, as ye may wel see,
Biquethe his heir his vertuous noblesse:
That is approped unto no degree
But to the firste fader in majestee,
That maketh his heir him that wol him queme, (8)
Al were he mitre, croune, or diademe.

1 foules: birds. 2 make: mate. 3 mowe: may. 4 steere: rudder. 5 tonne: cask.
6 traas: trace. 7 were: wear. 8 queme: please.

Young Man from Canada
Translations

"Tighinn Do America" ("Coming to America," Gaelic, Cape Breton)

At the bow of the vessel in a seat that's unsteady
I am watching the surge coming on us.
And out yonder under my gaze a big whale in a hurry
Who is spouting white streams from his nose.

In the dark forests there'll be no cuckoo calling,
Only woods with no eggs and no birds.
Leaving behind MacPherson, I'd like to be seeing you,
And it would be sweet for me to hear a word from your mouth.

You are going as usual on the trip to the Laraig
While I'm climbing on top of huge waves.
But Angus, my friend, I won't forget your talking
And wouldn't want such parting while I'm alive.

"De szeretnék hajnal csillag lenni" (Hungarian, Saskatchewan)

How I wish I were a morning star
Shining on my true love's window.
I would shine on her at dawn
So I could kiss her for the last time.

I deeply regret what I have done:
I have fallen in love with a young girl.
It was not really love, only idle talk,
I regret it, but it was not my fault.

"Le Roulier" ("The Wagoner," French, Gaspé)

Just now I drew my lot, figuring to avoid army service.
But luck, that rogue, has betrayed me; I must go to war.
I, who never struck anything but the grain in the field, must
now strike at the enemy.

Farewell, father and mother whom I love, farewell: dry your tears.
Since the law says I must serve in the profession of arms,
I may turn out to be a wee field marshal, or a general -- or a corporal.

Put aside your worries, Rose, my good little sweetheart;
I will always love you, and when I get to join the cavalry troop,
By heaven, I'll call my mare by your name, as a reminder of you.

No matter where I am, if I'm still alive, I'll send you my letters.
If I'm silent, that's different; that will be a bad sign:
It will mean I'm dead, and in that case you'll see why I don't write.